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## *What Great Human Beings We'll be Someday*

**Matthew Scott Healy**

I agreed to get along with Francisco during his ride to rehab. No insults, no sarcasm. Forget ethnic slurs. I couldn't call him a wop or a goombah or a guinea. My girlfriend Kendra made me promise all this, and I said fine, not being a guy who would screw things up when they're about to turn in my favor.

"This is a difficult decision for him," Kendra said. "Don't make it worse."

I was lying on the fold-out bed watching Kendra brushing her hair. She was standing in the doorway to the bathroom, head to one side as she pulled the brush through.

"What decision?" I said. "His P.O. told him to do it."

"He could have decided to run."

"He should have."

Kendra was topless, and I looked over at the window. The curtain rod on our living room window was dented in the middle, so the curtains hung funny, leaving enough space between them to see inside the apartment, even when we tried to close them. It was mostly dark out still, but Kendra had the bathroom light on, so anyone walking by would have a clean look at her, nothing stopping them. Our apartment complex only has one level, and all day the neighbors walk by, or sometimes it's no one we recognize—hoods, punks with shaved heads and wife-beaters, gang tats—looking into every open door and window as they go by, and I've explained to Kendra that we have to keep the curtains shut because they're looking for things to steal.

I said, "Why don't you clip those curtains together, for fuck's sake?"

"We don't own anything worth stealing."

"That's not what I'm worried about."

She tossed the hairbrush into the bathroom where I heard it rattle on the counter and into the sink. "Oh, Christ, Kevin. Why don't you just say what you're thinking instead of playing all this passive-aggressive bullshit?"

She put on the T-shirt she had worn yesterday with the words Role Model across the chest, and I felt relieved, felt it like someone had taken their foot off my neck.

"Better?" she asked, posing with her arms out, before stomping back into the

bathroom.

I won't describe what she looks like. I've tried to convince buddies who have never met her that she's hot in her own gutter-glam kind of way, but to do it takes a long time and I have to talk about the shape of her breasts once her bra is off, and her tiny shoulders—shoulders the size of oranges—and the tattoos she has on her calf and her wrist and the one she had put on the small of her back—Archetypal Slut—after she misheard some girl at a concert who called her a “typical slut.” Besides, I get pissed at myself when the guy finally gets it and has this look on his face like *now* he can picture her. I will say that if you saw her—I don't care what your tastes are—you'd think she was hot.

“Let's not go,” I said. “Forget Francisco. Let's stay inside. Let's not eat or drink or sleep. Let's just stay here and do things to each other that would make people sick.”

“Get dressed, Kevin.”

“I can't find a good reason to.”

“I'm taking your car if you're not ready in five minutes.”

I had the covers halfway off, an open invitation for Kendra, and I was trying not to pull them back up even though the air conditioning was freezing. I knew Kendra would never do it, but in my head she was climbing back in, wrapping herself and the covers around me, and the phone was ringing over and over without us picking up, laughing at the idea of Francisco at a pay phone, hanging up before the machine answers so he can reuse his only change. Then, as I thought this, the image of Francisco's finger in the coin return, I was getting out of bed.

“I thought Francisco already *was* in treatment,” I said.

“He failed that. This is residential. He's got to live there because he couldn't stay clean.”

I liked to consider myself well-informed when it came to drug programs—enough of my friends had gone to them—so I asked which one Frank was going to.

“Phoenix Prosperity. The one on 7th Ave,” she said. “Six months, gates, sign-in boards, prayer group.”

“A bunch of addicts sitting in a circle saying, ‘What great human beings we'll be someday.’”

Kendra came across the room, dragging her socks across the carpet so she could give me a shock of static electricity. “That's it, Kevin. Get it all out of your system now.” I let her touch my arm with her finger but nothing happened. She frowned. “Promise to be good today?”

Kendra was the reason for transporting this big bastard Francisco to treatment. This is how willing I was to do anything for her. Kendra and Frank had had a thing when he'd first come to Phoenix. He was from Milan. A big Italian



guy with a meth problem—although I always thought of him as German or Swiss because he was huge and had blonde hair and blue eyes. Hitler's progeny, I called him, just to fuck with him, and he flexed and posed like it was something to be proud of. Before Kendra and I hooked up, before she moved in with me and we had told each other that our love made it seem like we had never really been in love with anyone else, we used to get together with Francisco and shoot through a gallon or two of Popov vodka. Screwdrivers, Jackie Specials, Purple Motherfuckers, Bad Mojo. Kendra had a book of drink recipes and we made the drink if we hadn't heard of it. We partied, the three of us, wherever we could. Sometimes there were others, but mostly it was just us—me with no idea that Kendra and Frank were hooking up.

Back then I'd made the mistake of letting Francisco crash at my apartment for a few nights—oblivious that he was banging the girl who would one day become my girlfriend—and when he stayed with me he went around in nothing but tighty whities, parading around and singing Michael Jackson songs. Even in Italian I could recognize the beat of "The Man in the Mirror". Now I'm stuck with it, the mental picture of Francisco's body, built like he'd spent his whole life winning swimming team trophies.

Kendra assured me that they were never really together, not like a relationship or anything, and that it had lasted only a week. She said, "It was only sex and drugs." This she said as though it were a comforting thing. Not that anything she said could have helped when I imagined the two of them shooting up in a dingy motel room (Kendra was of a rare breed who could shoot heroin all night and then never want it again) and then fucking, Francisco with his big Italian hands satisfying Kendra in elaborate European ways, making her dream of getting laid by a foreign-guy come true. I know about Kendra's foreign-guy fantasy. She denied this too, of course. She actually said that before Francisco, she had never pictured herself sleeping with anyone who wasn't American. But I know why she really said this, and it was the same reason the stories about her and Francisco keep changing every time she told them, every version with less kissing, with less touching.

We agreed to pick Francisco up at a park where he was living. When he called that morning, Kendra said we would drive him to rehab because he was homeless and didn't have a job or a car. These past few weeks he'd been calling Kendra more regularly, filling her in on the chronicles of his life. The most recent developments were that he had been fired from two telemarketing jobs and had been questioned by police for assaulting a transvestite. These were some of his problems. Getting over Kendra was one of his problems. Not surprisingly, he blamed everything on the drugs, although sometimes he blamed his psychologi-

cal dysfunction. He once showed me a piece of paper that was in his wallet and it said, more or less, that he was crazy. The letter seemed authentic. I examined it as I would a fake dollar bill, holding it up to the light, looking at it from a higher angle. It was signed by a doctor and written on office stationery. I thought about craziness being responsible for his current condition and I felt sorry for the guy, thinking that his problems might be beyond his control and that he deserved sympathy. Then I would remember him as the guy who had had sex with my girlfriend right before she started dating me, that he wouldn't leave us alone because he was leeching off of Kendra's sympathy and understanding, and I'd remember why I hate him.

The sun was still low behind the buildings downtown. I followed Kendra through the parking lot. She walked by a little Mexican kid wearing diapers, who was working hard to get to his feet, but caught in a kind of push-up position. This kid was all alone. No parents in sight.

"Come here, little guy," Kendra said, and picked him up, taking him—just like that—out of danger. I loved this kind of stuff about her, even though I knew these were the same reasons Francisco was still around. Kendra carried him into the park where we found some woman sitting under a tree. "Is this your baby?"

"Yeah," the woman said, like she had some reason to be irritated.

"Maybe you should keep an eye on him," I said, as Kendra handed the kid over.

"Nothing would happen to him," the woman said. She was homeless, and as we walked away, I noticed the park was filled with them, wearing shorts and T-shirts because it was already so warm out—eighty-five degrees at eight in the morning and wide open spaces. A five-star resort for homeless people. Some of them were shuffling around a soccer ball in the middle of a field, no goal in sight, kicking it with full force like they were training for the World Cup.

"That's hilarious," I said, pointing them out to Kendra as we looked for Frank. I don't usually recognize irony, but this seemed like it.

Kendra looked insulted. "They're homeless."

"Like that's some kind of defense."

My idea of homeless people came from the guys lying on the street with their worldly possessions heaped around them. Frank wasn't that bad off. He wouldn't ever decline to the point where he'd be wheeling his stuff around in a shopping cart. He had some instinct of self-preservation that made it impossible for him to become like other homeless people. He was clean-shaven and alert. He managed to change clothes enough to make me think he had a closet somewhere, probably at the home of a middle-aged divorcee, some junkie who got off on a six-foot-five Italian coming over to shower and change and shoot up. Frank liked to wear polo-shirts and jeans, and at a distance he looked like anyone else, but



close up something wasn't right—the clothes were too snug or too loose. He had one yellow shirt he wore all the time, a Bill Gates shirt, but with a long line from a Magic Marker on the collar. I thought about this whenever he said that no one could ever tell he was homeless.

Kendra and I walked around for a while and found him sitting on a bench in front of the Park Ranger's office, hands buried in the pockets of an expensive-looking hooded jumper with the San Antonio Spurs logo across the front, and I wondered if he had stolen it. We almost drove right past him. He looked like a jogger taking a breather.

Frank grabbed a duffel bag and trotted up to the passenger window. He leaned his massive head in close to Kendra and smiled. "Got room for one more?" he said, and I wanted to hit the accelerator and watch him throw a fit in my rear view mirror.

"You sure you want to go through with this?" I said.

Kendra turned to me and narrowed her eyes. "Are you nervous, Francisco?" she said, turning back to him.

"Nervous? Check this out," he said, and held out his hands. I think he meant to show how steady he was, but from where I sat he looked like he had the shakes. He put his hands in the pockets of his jumper. "I'm getting off the streets," he said, as though he had convinced us. "How can I lose?"

"Well, get in," I said. "What are you waiting for?"

What happened next I keep replaying in my head whenever I think of this story. Kendra offered him the front seat. She said, "Here, Frank. You take the front seat." and then climbed over the stick shift to get into the back, and the way she moved opened her clothes up to show the small of her back and Frank, climbing in, stopped in his tracks, and said, "Wow," even though he must have known that tattoo was in a place not meant for him to see—"What's archetypal mean?" he said, butchering the pronunciation.

So I asked him what the hell did he think he was he looking at? "You want to fucking walk?" I said.

"What?" he said, and instantly, like he knew playing innocent wouldn't fly with me, said, "I'm very sorry. My mistake."

"Relax, boys." Kendra was in back, shimmying her shirt back into place. "It means I'm the original."

I took Francisco's duffel bag from him and handed it over the seat to Kendra. And don't think I didn't give it a good shake on the way back to hear if there was the tinkle of glass paraphernalia.

"There's nothing in there," Frank said. "Just socks and underwear and a check from my dad"—he turned in his seat to face Kendra to share this next bit—"he's paying for this treatment."

Frank's dad was a dentist in Italy. From what Frank probably told him, I wouldn't be surprised if he thought treatment was like summer camp, with canoe trips and character-building activities.

"You don't have anything in your pockets?" I said.

Kendra stretched her legs across the back seat. "He's going to treatment, Kevin. Give him a break."

"Yeah, I know where he's going, because I'm taking him there. It's my car. We'll get going when I turn on the ignition and put the car in gear. We'll get going when I know our passenger is not smuggling drugs in my car."

"You want to frisk me, too?" he said, turning the pockets of his sweatpants inside out. "You could have been a cop, Kevin."

I *did* want to frisk him, check his pants and see if he had anything stuck in the band of his underwear. You get to know plenty of addicts living in South Phoenix, you can't help it, just like you can't help but know their secrets because they're so eager to talk about it, like they're desperate for someone to hear them and know how clever they can be. Frank was this way too, when I first met him, talking about places he would hide his stash if he ever saw a cruiser enter the park. Kendra kicked the back of my seat.

"Let's go," she whined.

I took us north on Central Avenue, and then across Van Buren, through the part of Phoenix where people stand on sidewalks, not going anywhere, not waiting at bus stops. They watch passing traffic like at any second they think someone is going to stop and give them a ride. Men and women both, all of them looking like hookers. I look at them as I drive and they look back.

Frank was going off. "I'm going to get through treatment and I'm going to get off probation and I'm going to get a job and when I do I'm going to take both of you out for a big steak dinner to celebrate. You like steak dinners, don't you, cowboy?"

He had stopped calling me by my name when Kendra and I got together. Now I'm cowboy to him. Or dude. Or guy.

"I'll settle for cheeseburgers," Kendra said. "How about that, Frank? We'll all get cheeseburgers from Fuddruckers when you get out."

"I'm not going back to jail again," Frank said. "Jail is for suckers."

And I almost laughed because I never would have guessed he had ever been to jail from the way he talked. He used slogans everyone else knew were outdated, and maybe he thought he was cool enough to breathe new life into them.

"You don't have to get me anything," I said. "In fact, if you successfully go through treatment, I'll *buy* you the steak."

We all knew what I meant, but Kendra said, "How's that for incentive, Frank?"



Frank didn't say anything, and I thought we were done, but a minute later he started putting on a hell of a show, over there in the passenger seat, moving his head back and forth like he might be losing his mind, but doing it in such a way to make us think he was trying to keep it to himself. Ticks in his neck, that kind of thing, controlled and so quick you barely caught them. He can be a hell of a showman when he wants. I wanted to see how long he could keep it up, but Kendra put a stop to that. She leaned between our seats and—of course—said, "You okay, Francisco?"

"He's got the shakes," I said. "It's withdrawal."

Kendra said, "What time do they stop doing intakes at Phoenix Prosperity? You want to get something to eat before you go in?"

"They stop taking people at nine a.m.," Frank said, twitching a little more now that we had noticed him.

"They'll have food for him there," I said.

"The food in those places is terrible," Kendra said. "I'm hungry too. Let's find a place to stop. We'll have a quick meal together."

I pulled up at a place that had the sign out front: *Authentic Breakfast Burritos*. The restaurant must have been a bar once. Inside it had bar-type furniture—square, lacquered-wood tables attached to the floor with single black metal posts. The only light came from a propped-open door next to the kitchen. We ordered three breakfast burritos and coffee at the counter.

I took out my wallet to pay my share but Kendra said, "My treat."

"Fuck that," I said. "I don't want you paying for this guy's food. Either we all pay for ourselves or I pay for everyone."

"That doesn't make sense," Kendra said, irritated, turning away from the girl at the counter, who was waiting with one hand on the cash register. I asked Frank if he had any money to pitch in.

"I don't have anything," he said.

"You're broke," I said. "You have no money."

He held out his empty hands as some kind of proof. "If I had any money I'd pay for all of us."

"Okay then," I said, back to Kendra. "This is a point of pride. He doesn't get anything more from you. You've done enough for him already. Anything he needs in the next half hour I'll provide, because I don't expect anything in return. Here, Kendra. Take the money, Kendra."

I was the only one of us who could afford it. I've had the same job in the stereo components section at Best Buy for the last two years. I was holding out a ten dollar bill, but Kendra didn't take it until Frank said, "Just let him pay."

"What a humanitarian," Kendra said to me. "What a heart of gold."

She kept her eyes off me, on the counter. The woman behind the counter



looked nervously at the three of us as though we might pull her over the counter and maul her. She took our orders while still watching us, without looking at what she was writing.

We took our plates to a table. We were the only people in the restaurant. Traffic could be heard outside, but otherwise it was quiet and no one seemed interested in breaking it. If I hadn't been there, Kendra would be sitting closer to Francisco, probably filling him up with words of support and encouragement—I could see it now—and he would be figuring out a way to believe what she said, thinking of how it could help him. But we were all tight-lipped because I was there and that was fine with me. No one even mentioned how bad the burritos tasted, especially not Frank, who had only taken two bites and was pulling out strands of lettuce from one end. When it became clear that he wasn't going to eat another bite of the food I had bought for him, I said, "Something wrong with the food?"

"The food is great," he said, folding his arms and then unfolding them. "Exceptional. You're very generous."

"Not hungry then?"

His leg was bouncing in place. I had been watching it bounce for five minutes. It never slowed down. It was moving so fast that it seemed unnatural, and only the one leg, acting independently of his body. I had been trying to check his eyes, and when I finally got a good look I saw that the black parts were the size of pin-pricks. I tossed the rest of my burrito onto the plastic plate. "He's high," I said. "That's why he's not hungry. He's fucking high."

Frank straightened up in his chair. His expression didn't change. He didn't seem startled, but I figured that must have been the drugs. "I am not high," he said.

"What are you talking about?" Kendra said. "Are you high, Frank?"

"High as a kite," I said. "Look at his eyes."

Kendra looked, leaned in, tilted her head. "What am I looking for?"

"The pupils aren't dilated."

"What does that mean?" she said.

"It's dark in here. His pupils should be wide open. All black."

"You don't know what you're talking about," Frank said.

"I watch COPS."

Frank looked at Kendra. He said in a calm voice people use when they want to sound convincing, "I haven't done anything since Tuesday night. I swear it. I've been cleaning myself out."

Kendra didn't seem to hear him. She was evaluating him, making up her mind. I heard him, though. His denial registered first as a lie, then, played back in my head a few times, thinking about the way he said it and the way his face

looked, I wasn't so sure. As I said before, this guy could put on a show.

"Are they going to take him if he's high?" Kendra said.

"Kendra, look at me. I'm not high."

His leg had stopped, but when he moved closer to the table, leaning in to face Kendra in a desperate pose, I was positive he was lying. Good liars have more conviction than honest people do when telling the truth. They're too eager to be believed. I was hoping Kendra would be on my side right then, convinced, flat out. I hoped she would realize what kind of man we were dealing with. But I knew how easily she could be persuaded, because her natural instinct was to trust people. She had come from a trustworthy family and that made her want to believe what people told her.

So before she could make up her mind, I said, "I've got a question for you Frank. I've got an excellent question. We don't even care if you're high, just so long as you answer this one question truthfully. Are you ready?"

He looked suspicious. He was no fool.

I said, "If there were no laws against using drugs, if you didn't have people telling you all the time how drugs are going to ruin your life, if you didn't have a judge forcing you into treatment, if you never had to take another piss test again for as long as you lived, would you stop using drugs?"

He couldn't answer. He knew the answer, just like I did, but he didn't want to say it.

I said, "Well, Frank, you might want to think of something better to say if they ask you that question in treatment."

"We used to be friends, guy. All I want today is a ride."

He stood up, rising up, so tall you could see the process of his body parts working to get him up to a standing position, hips, rib cage, shoulders—he was a big son of a bitch—all of him rolling and sliding into place. "I'll be right back," he said, and he had changed his face to look like he was angry—no, scratch that. Not angry—hurt. Hurt we had doubted him. He lumbered down the hallway and into the restroom, the door marked for both men and women, the sign written in both English and Spanish.

I said to Kendra, "You know what he's doing right now, don't you?"

"You promised me."

"Yeah. That's true. But this guy is no good. Keeping this particular promise is less important than drawing attention to the fact that Frank is a fuck-up. More than a fuck-up."

"Baby, I love you, but you've got to help me here."

"This guy is a threat. Can't you see he can do real damage?"

She used her stir stick to probe the coffee and, not looking at me, this is what she said: "I'm not letting that get in the way of doing something good."



This didn't seem like a very good insult. I dismissed it, because we were building up towards an argument and it was her turn to say something she thought would hurt me. But a few days later I was still thinking about it, because I can be paranoid sometimes, and I wondered if what she said might be what she really thinks of me, that maybe she's got a certain picture of me built up in her head as a guy who is selfish instead of protective, that she didn't understand what I was trying to do. And naturally I wondered what else I was doing that made her think of me in ways that were inaccurate or untrue. So I've been second-guessing my instincts since Thursday, going around the apartment biting my tongue, my natural routine all fucked up because I keep thinking about all the ways Kendra might misunderstand what I'm saying or doing. This is how lethal Kendra can be with an insult, because she plants it and then it grows until it splits you open from the inside.

But at the restaurant, none of this occurred to me. I wasn't second-guessing myself yet, so when Frank came out of the restroom I looked at him and saw that his hooded jumper was in perfect condition, not a mark or stain on it, the Spurs logo shiny even in the dim lighting. It looked brand new, which, for some reason really pissed me off. Here I was paying for his breakfast, giving him a ride to treatment, and he had better clothes than I did. I couldn't even prove to Kendra what a low-life he was. "Think I'll use the pisser too," I said, "before we go. That all right with you guys? Do we have time?"

Kendra looked at her watch and I said, "It'll only take a second."

In the restroom I lifted the porcelain lid off the toilet and looked inside. I pried open the paper towel holder and shuffled through the stack of cardboard-brown paper towels. I overturned the trash and pushed it around the floor with the toe of my shoe. When I couldn't find anything, I looked around and saw the soap dispenser next to the sink. I unscrewed the cap and when I stirred the liquid soap with my finger, I found a pipe, a little glass tube, coated with pink, dripping soap. I ran some water over it and dried it with a paper towel. One end of the pipe was charred black. I put it in my shirt pocket, went back to the table, and they both looked, in my opinion, guilty.

"Okay," I said. "All set. Let's go."

Phoenix Prosperity was a long, cinderblock building in the middle of a residential neighborhood, painted white and striped with yellow and blue and red arrows on the outer walls so the new guys know where to find things like the kitchen and chapel. I looked at the building over Francisco's shoulder, and the first thing he noticed was the gates—his big blonde head going from left to right, following the perimeter of the fence, with its electric locks and posted signs of visiting hours.

I heard Frank say, "Six months" to himself without any real indication of how he felt, but clearly he was sweating it.

When Kendra offered to walk him up to the building I agreed that we should, absolutely, let's follow this thing through.

The lobby was empty and looked like it hadn't been cleaned in days. A particle-board table against the far wall had about a dozen Styrofoam cups with coffee rings on it. A fly made the rounds, landing on the lip of a cup, crawling around the edge and then down, inside, a few seconds later emerging and setting down on the next cup.

"I guess this is good-bye," Kendra said.

"Hold on a minute," I said. "We're here. Let's make sure this gets done right. That Frank is signed in. Not that I don't trust you." I gave Frank a look and he took a deep breath, not letting it out. His head went back and his posture got straight in a weird way, like he was about to start levitating.

I leaned over the receptionist's counter and yelled. It was almost nine. A guy came out from the back. The guy had sideburns that turned into a moustache, a big bushy deal that would have been ridiculous on anyone else, but this guy pulled it off. He looked like the kind of guy who already had a reason to hate you. He told us his name but I can't remember it.

"We need to talk to someone who handles intakes," I said.

The guy looked the three of us over and his eyes went back to Frank. He knew right off that of the three of us, Frank was the damaged goods. "I handle intakes."

"My P.O. called in yesterday," Frank said.

The guy went to a big dry erase board on the wall with names written on it. Frank's name was already there and there was a row of empty boxes next to it for people to check things off as they did them—sweeping the floor, completing a meeting—that kind of stuff. "What's your name?"

"Francisco Bivona," he said.

"Okay," the guy said. "I remember now. We've got a bed set up. Come on around the back."

Frank picked his duffel bag up and took a step towards the door.

"Just a minute," I said. "My name is Kevin and this is Kendra. We're the ones who brought him in here today."

The guy with the chops waited.

"Anyway, we have Francisco's best interests at heart, you know? We're friends of his. We want nothing more than for him to go through treatment. But you should know that before you take him that he's not coming in clean." I took the pipe out of my pocket and held it out. The intake guy looked at the pipe but didn't take it. "See? I just found this ten minutes ago in a restaurant where Fran-



cisco dumped it. My guess is he was planning to bring it in to Phoenix Prosperity and thought better of it."

Kendra said, "That could be anyone's."

"Jesus, Kendra. Don't be stupid."

The guy with the chops didn't do anything with this information. He had a stash of words he allowed himself every day and he wasn't going to waste any on me. We all stood there, in a kind of square formation, knowing the pipe was Francisco's.

"Francisco has a serious problem," Kendra said, apologizing to the guy whose name I can't remember. She was in it with me. The two of us. She was pissed at me, I could see it in the way she moved her arms, tight and jerky like she had forgotten how to operate them, but the only thing she could do was back me up. For Francisco's sake.

"I don't know about the other guys in treatment," I said, "but Francisco will be the first one to admit he's got hardcore emotional and psychological issues. He's got a letter from a psychiatrist that I'm sure he'll show you. Anyway, this is not his first time in treatment. It's not his second or his third. He stays for a few days, talking about how committed he is to recovery, and then he takes off for no reason and gets high. This is probably nothing new to you. But he's also been using this morning. He's high right now."

Frank didn't deny it this time. I was almost hoping he was going to come up with some act, but he was standing there without a show, waiting for the other guy to say something. Frank had his duffel bag in hand and looked like he would completely give in to whatever decision the rehab guy made. His body was still abnormally straight, and I saw now that he was taking quick, shallow breaths through his nose to maintain it.

I wondered if I should say anything more, if I had done enough, and then went on, "I'm just saying all this because I thought maybe you guys could keep an extra eye on Frank. You know, because he's going to try to get away."

"You guys are some real friends," said the guy with the chops. Kendra would later rehash the way he said this over and over, trying to figure out if the guy was being sarcastic or not. "We're going to help Frank understand that he's got to stay away from people that are going to hurt his recovery."

"That's a good policy," I agreed.

Kendra said, "Frank, do you want me to call your P.O. and let him know you're here?" I wished she hadn't said this. There was something so pathetic about the way she said it.

"We'll take care of that," the guy said. "You don't have to worry. I'm taking him back now."

As they went out, Kendra said, "Good luck" but Frank didn't look over. You'd

think that in a moment like this—where you believe you'll never see someone again, which is what I was believing—that you'll get something out of it that you can tell somebody about years down the line, about how he said *this* and then I said *this*. You hope that everyone will say something memorable enough to make a good story out of it. But it just happened that Frank and the guy whose name I can't remember simply opened a door and went through it. Not even a look back, which I guess is the best possible thing. And when they were gone, it was just me and Kendra, and we went back out to the car.

Let me just say now that Frank didn't make it. On Saturday the counselors at Phoenix Prosperity told him to go look for a job and be back in four hours. He didn't go back. I know this because Frank's probation officer called this morning and talked to Kendra, wanting to know where Frank was. He thought he might be staying with us. He said that Frank had skipped out on treatment and would have no choice but to write a warrant if he couldn't find him. Even after everything I had said on Thursday, Frank wrote down our phone number as the number to call in case of emergency. It's funny how he won't give up on some things. After Kendra hung up the phone, she told me what happened in about two sentences and then she went in the bathroom. The bathroom was the only place in the apartment where one of us could go for any privacy. I watched TV for a while and when she didn't come out I put the TV on mute and listened. Then I went to the bathroom door. I thought maybe she was crying, but I doubted it, because I couldn't hear anything like sobbing, and because Kendra isn't the type to cry. I've seen her cry maybe twice in the entire time we've been together, once when her parents told her they didn't want her to move in with me, and once a few weeks ago when she was wasted and arguing about how Francisco needed support and I told her to drop the Samaritan act. More likely, she was probably just stewing in the bathroom now, not wanting to face me, and here's why: because I had been right about Frank. I knew he wasn't going to make it and she was being pissy that I had made my points clear. I could have said something through the door, but I didn't, because I had already told Kendra everything I needed to say at Phoenix Prosperity.

That day, as we walked out, Kendra had said, "You're wrong about Frank."

I laughed. I really thought it was funny that she kept on with this. "This time will be no different. How much do you want to bet? I'll bet you a hundred dollars right now that it'll be no different."

"At the restaurant," she said, "when you were in the bathroom, Frank said that I was the reason he was going to make it through treatment."

"What's that supposed to mean? That's going to make a difference?"

We got in the car. I wondered if Frank was unpacking in his room and watch-



ing us through the window, waiting for us to drive off. I wanted Kendra to kiss me, and although I knew she was in no mood for it, that we were on the verge of an argument, I couldn't help myself. I reached over, rubbed her forearm and up to the bicep. And when she didn't respond one way or the other, I moved my hand up to her shoulder, to the back of her neck. I brought my other hand over.

"At least it's over," I said, almost whispering.

"Will you acknowledge that it's different this time?" she said, as though my hands weren't on her.

"Touch me back."

"Are you listening?"

"Yeah, but I wish you were talking about something else."

"Why don't you want him to get better? I can understand if you're jealous—"

"I'm not jealous," I said. "I'm disgusted. Anybody would be disgusted. To think that you did the same things with him that you do with me."

"Fine. Okay. You're not jealous. What I mean is, why don't you want him to get better, regardless of whatever you think about him? Can't you want a person to get better?"

"What's wrong with you?" I said. "That doesn't have anything to do with me. All I'm saying, all I've ever said from the start, is that he's not going to make it. That's just a fact. That's like saying that two plus two equals four or that the sky is blue. It's all the same thing as saying that he isn't going to make it."

"Can you not say that, please?" she said, and she wasn't arguing anymore, but pleading, the way she does when she's losing the fight, or thinks I'm missing the point. "Can you just allow room for the possibility?"

"I don't know why it's so important for me to think he's going to make it."

I looked at the windows of Phoenix Prosperity. They were covered with hand-written recovery slogans, *One Day at a Time... The Elevator is Broken, Take the Steps... Faith Without Works is Dead*. I started the car and put it in drive and kept my foot on the brake. I knew what she wanted me to say, but I couldn't do it.

"He's not going to make it," I said again, this time like I wasn't joking, or trying to hurt her—just stating a fact.

She folded her arms the way she does when she's done with me, her last defense, when it's clear to her that I'm such a moron I can't possibly see her side of it. But it was important she understand, regardless of what she believed, that he wasn't going to make it, not even with her apparently inexhaustible supply of hope and good intentions.